

6

Nausicaa

Book Six

Washed up naked and half-drowned on an unknown shore, Odysseus is woken by girls at play. He finds the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa – and, with nothing but his wits and words, must win her help. A book of hospitality and supplication, of a hero's cunning working through courtesy alone, and of a young woman, kind and clever, drawn to a stranger she can never keep.

NAME

SET

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BOOK SIX

Nausicaa

Scherie, the enchanted island-kingdom of the seafaring Phaeacians, where the shipwrecked Odysseus is washed ashore.

WHAT HAPPENS

- Athene visits the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa in a dream, prompting her to go to the river to wash clothes, with thoughts of marriage in mind.
- Odysseus, naked and salt-caked, is woken by the girls' play; he emerges like a lion and supplicates Nausicaa with a careful, flattering speech.
- Nausicaa alone stands firm, treats him with courtesy, and has him bathed, clothed and fed; Athene makes him radiant.
- She admires him and wishes for such a husband, but gives him careful directions to avoid the townsfolk's gossip.
- She tells him to enter the palace and supplicate her mother, Queen Arete; Odysseus waits in Athene's grove and prays.

WHO WE MEET

Nausicaa

the young princess: kind, tactful, proper

Odysseus

the castaway suppliant, cunning even naked

Athene

guiding both, unseen

The Phaeacians

an isolated, god-favoured seafaring people

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 6 is a study in xenia and supplication, and in Odysseus' metis working through words alone. Nausicaa is one of Homer's most finely drawn characters, and the meeting turns on tact, propriety and a marriage the two can never make. **Prescribed:** examined in context – know it closely.

Nausicaa

— THE PHAEACIANS

So there he slept, **the much-enduring patient Odysseus**, conquered by sleep and weariness, but Athene came to the country and city of the Phaeacians. These Phaeacians had once lived in the broad lands of Hypereie, and **been neighbours to the Cyclopes**, a domineering people, who used to take advantage of their greater strength to ravage their land, till the day when the godlike Nausithous took them and **settled them in Scherie, far from ordinary hard-working people**. There he laid out the walls of a new city, built houses, put up temples to the gods, and divided up the land for cultivation. But he had long since met his fate and gone to Hades' Halls; and **it was now the divinely inspired Alcinous who ruled them**. To his palace the bright-eyed goddess Athene made her way, intent on her plans for the great-hearted Odysseus' return.

The mighty Alcinous had a young daughter called Nausicaa, **tall and beautiful as a goddess**. She was asleep now in her richly decorated room, with two of her maids, both blessed with beauty by the Graces, lying asleep by the door-posts, one on either side.

— A DREAM OF MARRIAGE

The polished doors were closed; but Athene swept through like a breath of air to the girl's bed, leant over her head and spoke to her, **taking the form of the daughter of a ship's captain** named Dymas, a girl of Nausicaa's own age and one of her closest friends.

In the form of this girl, bright-eyed Athene said: 'Nausicaa, how did your mother come to have such a lazy daughter as you? All your shining clothes have been left lying about neglected, but **you may soon be married and need beautiful clothes**, not only to wear yourself but to provide for your bridegroom's party. That is how a bride gains a good reputation with people, which brings great pleasure to her father and her mother. Let us go and do some washing together the first thing in the morning. I will go with you and help, so that you can get it done as soon as possible, because you certainly won't remain unmarried long. Every nobleman in Phaeacia, where you yourself were born and bred, wants you for his wife. Ask your royal father in the morning to have a waggon made ready for you with a couple of mules. It can take the sashes and robes and bright rugs, and it would be much better for you yourself to ride than to go on foot; it's a long way from the city to the washing-pools.'

When she had finished, bright-eyed Athene withdrew to Olympus, where people say the gods have made their everlasting home. **Shaken**

LINE 1

the much-enduring patient Odysseus Greek heroes each have a stock nickname that keeps coming back – these are called **epithets**. Odysseus' is 'much-enduring' (Greek *polytlas*): it points to his knack of putting up with and surviving pretty much anything. We meet him here just after a shipwreck (Book 5), washed up asleep on a strange beach.

LINE 4

been neighbours to the Cyclopes The **Cyclopes** are savage one-eyed giants who live with no laws and no farming. Odysseus runs into one of them, Polyphemus, in Book 9. The Phaeacians used to live near them before they moved away.

LINES 7–8

settled them in Scherie, far from ordinary hard-working people The **Phaeacians** are a people of expert sailors who live right at the edge of the world, on the island of Scherie. They're half-magical and specially favoured by the gods – the last fairy-tale place Odysseus visits before he finally gets home to Ithaca.

LINES 10–11

it was now the divinely inspired Alcinous who ruled them Alcinous is the king of the Phaeacians. His palace is where Odysseus is heading, and where the next couple of books take place.

LINES 14–15

tall and beautiful as a goddess Nausicaa is the king's daughter – young, and not yet married.

LINE 20

taking the form of the daughter of a ship's captain In Greek myth the gods are forever disguising themselves as ordinary people to move around among mortals. Here Athene takes the shape of one of Nausicaa's friends.

LINES 24–25

you may soon be married and need beautiful clothes In the ancient world a bride was expected to bring a big supply of fine clothes and linen with her into a marriage.

LINES 38–39

Shaken by no wind, drenched by no showers, and invaded by no snows Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece, imagined as the home of the gods. Homer describes it as perfect and weatherless – always calm and bright.

by no wind, drenched by no showers, and invaded by no snows, it is
 40 set in cloudless limpid air with a white radiance playing over all.
 There the blessed gods spend their days in pleasure, and there the
 Lady of the Bright Eyes went when she had spoken to the girl.

— NAUSICAA WAKES

Soon after, Dawn enthroned herself in the sky, and woke up Nausicaa
 in her lovely gown. She was amazed at her dream and set out at once
 45 through the palace to tell her father and her mother. She found them
 both in the house. Her mother was sitting at the hearth with her
 ladies, **spinning yarn dyed with sea-purple**; and she met her father
 just as he was going out to join the distinguished princes at a
 conference to which the Phaeacian nobles had called him.

— ASKING HER FATHER

50 She went close to her dear father and said: 'Father dear, I wonder if
 you could tell them to get me a high-sided waggon with strong
 wheels, so that I can take all the fine clothes that I have lying about
 dirty to the river to wash? And indeed it is only proper for you
 yourself when you are discussing affairs of state with important
 55 people to have clean linen on your back. Then there are five sons of
 yours in the palace, two married, and three active bachelors who are
 always asking for clothes straight from the wash to wear at dances. It
 is I who have to think of all these things.'

She spoke in this way because she was too shy to mention to her
 60 father the subject of marriage and all its promises. But he understood
 completely and replied: 'I don't grudge you the mules, my child, or
 anything else. You may go; and the servants shall get you a fine high-
 sided waggon with a hood to it.'

He called to his men and they obeyed. While they prepared a
 65 smooth-running mule cart outside, led the mules under the yoke and
 harnessed them to it, Nausicaa fetched the gaily coloured clothing
 from the room and packed it in the polished waggon. Meanwhile her
 mother filled a box with various kinds of appetizing provisions and
 delicacies to go with them, and poured some wine into a goatskin
 70 bottle.

The girl climbed into the waggon and her mother handed her a
golden flask of soft olive-oil, so that she and her ladies could rub
 themselves with it after bathing.

— TO THE RIVER

And now Nausicaa took the whip and the gleaming reins, and flicked
 75 the mules to make them start. There was a clatter of hooves, and they
 stepped out eagerly, taking the clothes and their mistress along. But

LINE 47

spinning yarn dyed with sea-purple Spinning and weaving wool was the proper work of a respectable woman, queens included. **Sea-purple** was a hugely expensive dye made from shellfish, so it's a sign of real wealth and royalty. The woman here is the queen, **Arete**.

LINES 71–72

a golden flask of soft olive-oil Olive oil was the ancient world's soap and moisturiser rolled into one – after a wash you'd rub it into your skin.

as her ladies followed and kept her company, she was not alone.

— THE WASHING

They reached the lovely river with its never-failing pools, in which there was enough clear water always bubbling up and swirling by to
 80 clean the dirtiest clothes. Here they unharnessed the mules and drove them along the eddying stream to graze on the sweet grass. Then they lifted the clothes by the armful from the waggon, carried them to the dark water and **trod them down briskly in the washing-pools**, vying with each other in the work. When they had rinsed them
 85 till no dirt was left, they spread them out in a row along the sea-shore, just where the waves washed the shingle clean as they came tumbling up the beach.

Next, after bathing and rubbing themselves with olive-oil, they took their meal at the riverside, waiting for the sunshine to dry the
 90 clothes. Presently, when mistress and maids had all enjoyed their food, they threw off their headgear and began playing with a ball, while Nausicaa of the white arms sang and kept time for their game.

— LIKE ARTEMIS

She looked like Artemis the Archeress, coming down from the mountain along the high ridge of Taygetus or Erymanthus for the joy
 95 of chasing the wild boar or the nimble deer, and **the Nymphs of the countryside (daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus)** join with her in the sport. And her mother Leto's heart is gladdened, because **she is a head taller than any of them** and even though all are beautiful there is no question which is she. So did this young girl stand out among
 100 her maids.

— ODYSSEUS WAKES

When she was about to yoke the mules and fold the beautiful no clothes and set out for home, **the bright-eyed goddess Athene had other ideas** and arranged for Odysseus to wake up and see this lovely girl who was to serve as his escort to the Phaeacian city.
 105 Accordingly, when the princess threw the ball to one of her maids, it missed her and fell into the deep, eddying current. At this they all gave a loud shriek.

The noble Odysseus awoke, and, sitting up, wondered to himself. 'What country have I come to this time?' he said with a groan. 'What
 110 people are there here? **Hostile and uncivilized savages, or kindly and god-fearing people?** There's a shrill echo in my ears, as though some girls were shrieking – Nymphs, who haunt the steep hill-tops, the springs of rivers, and the grassy meadows. Or am I by any chance among human beings who can talk as I do? Well, I must go and use
 115 my own eyes to find out.'

LINES 83–84

trod them down briskly in the washing-pools

There were no washing machines, of course – clothes got cleaned by treading them underfoot in pools of running water.

LINE 93

She looked like Artemis the Archeress

Artemis – daughter of Zeus and twin sister of Apollo – is the goddess of hunting and wild places, and a virgin goddess who never marries. Homer compares Nausicaa to her: this kind of extended 'like...' comparison is a **simile**, one of his favourite techniques.

LINES 95–96

the Nymphs of the countryside (daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus) Nymphs are minor

nature-goddesses – spirits of springs, hills and woods – who often go about in Artemis' company. 'Aegis-bearing' describes Zeus by his *aegis*, a terrifying storm-shield that scatters his enemies.

LINES 97–98

she is a head taller than any of them Being 'a head taller' than everyone around is Homer's stock way of marking someone out as special, almost god-like.

LINES 102–103

the bright-eyed goddess Athene had other ideas 'Bright-eyed' (or 'grey-eyed') is Athene's regular epithet – her fixed nickname.

LINES 110–111

Hostile and uncivilized savages, or kindly and god-fearing people? *Xenia* is the sacred duty of hospitality – taking strangers in, feeding them, and sending them safely on their way. It's the big test Odysseus faces at every new place he lands: keep the custom and you count as civilised; break it and you're no better than a savage.

So the noble Odysseus crept out from under the bushes, after breaking off with his great hand a leafy bough from the thicket **to conceal his naked manhood**.

— THE LION

Then he advanced on them **like a mountain lion who sallies out, defying wind and rain** in the pride of his power, with fire in his eyes, to hunt down the oxen or sheep or pursue the wild deer. Forced by hunger, he will even attack flocks in a well-protected fold. So Odysseus, naked as he was, made a move towards these girls with their braided hair; necessity compelled him. Grimy with salt he was a
 125 gruesome sight, and the girls went scuttling off in every direction along the jutting spits of sand.

Alcinous' daughter Nausicaa was the only one to stand firm. **Athene put courage into her heart** and took the fear from her limbs, and she stood her ground and faced him.

— THE SUPPLICATION

130 Odysseus considered **whether he should throw his arms round the beautiful girl's knees** and beg for help, or just keep his distance and beg her with all courtesy to give him clothing and direct him to the city. He decided that as the lady might take offence if he embraced her knees it would be better to keep his distance and courteously
 135 plead his case.

In the end, his address was both courteous and full of subtlety: 'Princess, I am at your knees. Are you some goddess or a mortal woman? If you are one of the gods who live in the wide heaven, it is of Artemis, the Daughter of almighty Zeus, **that your beauty, grace**
 140 **and stature most remind me**. But if you are one of us mortals who live on earth, then thrice-blessed indeed are your father and your lady mother; thrice-blessed your brothers too. How their hearts must glow with pleasure every time they see their darling join the dance! But he is the most blessed of them all who with his wedding gifts can
 145 win you and take you home as a bride. Never have I set eyes on any man or woman like you. I am overcome with awe as I look at you. **Only in Delos have I seen the like, a fresh young palm-tree** shooting up by the altar of Apollo, when my travels took me there – with a fine army at my back, that time, though the expedition was
 150 doomed to end so fatally for me. For a long time I stood spellbound at the sight, for no such sapling ever sprang from the ground.

'And it is with just the same wonder and veneration that I look at you, my lady, and I dare not clasp your knees, though my sufferings are serious enough. Only yesterday, after nineteen days, I made my
 155 escape from **the wine-dark sea**. It took all that time for the waves

LINES 117–118

to conceal his naked manhood He's lost everything in the shipwreck and is completely naked, so he breaks off a branch to cover himself. A strange man appearing naked in front of a young princess and her maids was a serious breach of decency.

LINES 119–120

like a mountain lion who sallies out, defying wind and rain Another **simile**: driven by sheer need, Odysseus is compared to a starving lion forced out to hunt. Homer's long comparisons nearly always come from nature or everyday life.

LINES 127–128

Athene put courage into her heart In Homer the gods often act by dropping a feeling or an idea straight into someone's mind – courage, fear, a sudden plan. Here Athene gives Nausicaa the nerve to stand her ground.

LINES 130–131

whether he should throw his arms round the beautiful girl's knees Grabbing hold of someone's knees is the formal gesture of *supplication* (see the next note). Odysseus decides that doing it to a young girl would be too much – the quick, calculating thinking the Greeks called *metis*.

LINE 137

Princess, I am at your knees *Supplication* is the formal way of begging someone for protection: normally you clasp their knees, which puts you under the gods' protection. Here Odysseus does it with words alone, without daring to touch her.

LINES 139–140

that your beauty, grace and stature most remind me Comparing a young unmarried woman to the virgin goddess **Artemis** was a graceful, respectful compliment.

LINE 147

Only in Delos have I seen the like, a fresh young palm-tree **Delos** is a small sacred island – famous as the birthplace of the god **Apollo**.

LINE 155

the wine-dark sea 'Wine-dark' is one of Homer's famous fixed phrases for the sea. Ancient Greek had no ordinary word for 'blue', and scholars still argue about what colour he actually meant.

and the tempestuous winds to carry me here from the island of Ogygia. And now some god has flung me on this shore, no doubt to suffer more disasters here. For I have no hope that my troubles will come to an end: the gods have plenty in store for me before that can be.

Pity me, princess. You are the first person I have met after all I have been through, and I do not know a soul in this city or this land. Do direct me to the town and give me some rags to put round myself, if only the cloth wrappings you may have brought when you came here. And may the gods grant you your heart's desire; **may they give you a husband and a home**, and the blessing of harmony so much to be desired, since there is nothing better or finer than when two people of one heart and mind keep house as man and wife, a grief to their enemies and a joy to their friends, and their reputation spreads far and wide.'

— NAUSICAA REPLIES

'Sir,' said the white-armed Nausicaa, 'since your manners show you are not a bad man or a fool – it is **Olympian Zeus himself who assigns good fortune to men**, good and bad alike, as he wills, and must have sent you your personal misfortune – and you must just endure it – but now since you have come to our country and our city here, you certainly shall not want for clothing or anything else that **an unfortunate suppliant has the right to expect** from those he meets. I will show you the way to the town and tell you who we are. This country and the city belong to the Phaeacians. I myself am the daughter of greathearted Alcinous, who is the source of the might and majesty of the Phaeacian people.'

— THE SUPPLIANT'S RIGHT

Here she turned and called out to her maids: 'Stop, girls. Where are you flying to at the sight of a man? Don't tell me you take him for an enemy. There is no man on earth, nor ever will be, who would dare to set hostile feet on Phaeacian soil. The gods are too fond of us for that. Remote, we are at the edge of the world and come in contact with no other people. This man is an unfortunate wanderer who has strayed here, and we must look after him, since **all strangers and beggars come under the protection of Zeus**, and to such people a small gift can mean much. So give him food and drink, girls, and bathe him in the river where there's shelter from the wind.'

The girls stood still, each urging the others on. Then they led Odysseus to a sheltered place where he could sit down as Nausicaa, the daughter of the great-hearted Alcinous, had ordered. On the ground beside him they laid a tunic and cloak for him to wear, and, giving him some soft olive-oil in a golden flask, they told him to wash

LINES 165–166

may they give you a husband and a home

Odysseus wishes Nausicaa a good marriage – a husband and wife 'of one heart and mind'. That kind of shared-mindedness was the Greek picture of a perfect marriage.

LINES 172–173

Olympian Zeus himself who assigns good fortune to men

A very common Greek belief: **Zeus**, king of the gods, hands out good and bad luck to people however he sees fit, and mortals just have to put up with it.

LINE 177

an unfortunate suppliant has the right to expect

A *suppliant* – someone who has formally begged for protection – had real rights: to be given clothes, food and help on their journey. People felt the gods themselves guaranteed these.

LINES 188–189

all strangers and beggars come under the protection of Zeus

This is the heart of *xenia*. Strangers and beggars were thought to be under the special protection of **Zeus Xenios** – 'Zeus of guests and strangers'. Turn one away, or worse, and you weren't just being rude – you were insulting Zeus himself.

himself in the running stream.

— ODYSSEUS BATHES

Then the good Odysseus said to them, ‘Ladies, stand back over there and leave me to wash the brine from my shoulders and rub my body
200 with olive-oil. It’s a long time since olive-oil has touched my skin. I am not going to take my bath with you looking on. I should be ashamed to stand naked in the presence of elegant ladies.’

At this they withdrew and told their young mistress about it. Meanwhile with river-water Odysseus was washing off the salt that
205 encrusted his back and his broad shoulders, and scrubbing his head free of the scurf left there by the barren sea.

When he had thoroughly washed and rubbed himself with oil and had put on the clothes which the girl had given him, Athene, daughter of Zeus, **made him seem taller and sturdier** and caused the bushy locks
210 to hang from his head thick as the petals of a hyacinth in bloom. Just as a craftsman trained by Hephaestus and Pallas Athene in the secrets of his art puts a graceful finish to his work by **overlaying silverware with gold**, she endowed his head and shoulders with beauty.

— TRANSFORMED

215 When Odysseus retired to sit down by himself on the sea-shore, he was radiant with grace and beauty. Nausicaa gazed at him in admiration and said to her beautiful-haired attendants: ‘Listen, my white-armed girls, to what I am saying. This man’s arrival among the godlike Phaeacians was not opposed by all, the gods of Olympus.
220 When we first met I thought him repulsive, but now he looks like the gods who live in heaven. I wish I could have a man like him for my husband, if only he were content to stay and live here. But come, girls, give the stranger something to eat and drink.’ Her maids at once carried out her orders and set food and drink before the
225 stalwart Odysseus, who ate and drank with avidity, for it was a long time since he had tasted any food.

— NAUSICAA’S WISH

Nausicaa of the white arms now turned her mind to other matters. After folding up the clothing, she stowed it in her fine waggon, harnessed the strong-hooved mules, and herself climbed in. Then
230 she called to Odysseus. ‘Come, sir, and make a move towards the city, so that I can direct you to my good father’s house, where I can assure you that you will meet all the Phaeacian nobility. But this is what you must do – and I take you for a man of understanding. So long as we are passing through the country and the farmers’ lands, walk quickly
235 with my maids behind the waggon and the mules, following me.

LINE 209

made him seem taller and sturdier The gods can make a mortal look more impressive – taller, stronger, better-looking. Athene does this for Odysseus whenever he needs to make a good first impression.

LINES 212–213

overlaying silverware with gold A simile taken from metalwork: Athene finishes Odysseus off the way a skilled craftsman coats silver with gold. Homer loves comparisons drawn from human crafts and skills.

— THE WAY TO THE CITY

‘But once we come to our city – it is surrounded by high battlements; it has an excellent harbour on each side and is approached by a narrow causeway, where the curved ships are drawn up to the road and each owner has his separate landing-place. Here
 240 is the people’s meeting-place, built up next to **the fine temple of Poseidon** with blocks of quarried stone bedded deeply in the ground. It is here too that the sailors attend to the rigging of the black ships, their cables and sails, and smoothe their oars. For the Phaeacians have no use for the bow and quiver, but only for masts and oars on
 245 the graceful craft they take pride in sailing across the grey seas.

— AVOIDING GOSSIP

‘Now it is their unpleasant gossip that I wish to avoid. I am afraid they might give me a bad name, for they are supercilious people, and I can well imagine one of the cruder ones saying after he had seen us: “**Who is this tall and handsome stranger with Nausicaa?** Where
 250 did she find him? Her future husband no doubt! She must have rescued some shipwrecked foreigner who had strayed this way, since we have no neighbours. Or perhaps some god has answered her insistent prayers and stooped from heaven to make her his for ever. And it is better that way – better that she should look around
 255 and find a husband from abroad. For she obviously despises her fellow Phaeacians though so many of the best would like to marry her.” That is how they will talk, and my good name would suffer. Indeed I should blame any girl who behaved like that – who behind her family’s back, while her parents were still alive, associated with men before being
 260 properly married.

‘So listen carefully to my directions if you want my father’s help for your homeward journey as soon as possible. You will see near the path **a fine poplar wood sacred to Athene**, with a spring welling up in the middle and a meadow all round. That is where my father has his
 265 estate and fertile garden within calling distance of the city. Sit down there and wait a little till we get into the town and reach my father’s house. When you think we have had time to do so, go into the city yourself and ask for the palace of my father, the great-hearted Alcinous. It is quite easy to recognize: any little child could show it
 270 to you. For the houses of the rest are not built in anything like the style of the palace of King Alcinous, my father.

— FIND THE QUEEN

‘Directly you have passed through the courtyard and into the buildings, walk quickly through the great hall till you reach my mother, who sits in the firelight by the hearth, spinning yarn dyed
 275 with sea-purple – a marvellous sight – with her chair against a pillar

LINES 240–241

the fine temple of Poseidon The Phaeacians’ city is built around a temple of **Poseidon**, god of the sea – a fitting patron for a nation of sailors.

LINE 249

Who is this tall and handsome stranger with Nausicaa Nausicaa imagines exactly what the townspeople would gossip if they saw her bringing a strange man home. An unmarried girl’s reputation was easily damaged, and she’s careful to protect hers.

LINE 263

a fine poplar wood sacred to Athene A grove of trees dedicated to **Athene**. Particular springs, woods and groves were often sacred to a particular god.

and her ladies sitting behind. My father's throne is close to hers, and there he sits drinking his wine like a god. **Slip past him and clasp my mother's knees** if you wish to see the day of your homecoming and rejoice, however far away it is. For if she is sympathetic to you, you may confidently expect to see your friends again, to reach your own fine house and your native land.'

When she had finished, Nausicaa used her shiny whip on the mules, and they soon left the flowing river behind them, their legs weaving a pattern as they trotted steadily along. She drove so as to allow the maids and Odysseus to keep up with her on foot, and used her judgement in laying on the whip.

— ODYSSEUS PRAYS

As the sun was setting they reached the famous grove, the sacred place of Athene. Here the good Odysseus sat down and prayed to the Daughter of almighty Zeus. 'Hear me, Atrytone, Unwearied One, Child of Zeus who bears the aegis, and hear my prayer this time; you turned a deaf ear to me before, when I was shipwrecked and the great Earthshaker shattered my raft. Grant that the Phaeacians may receive me with kindness and compassion.'

Pallas Athene heard his prayer but still refrained from appearing before him, **out of deference to her Father's brother Poseidon**, who persisted in his rancour against the noble Odysseus until he reached his own land.

LINES 277–278

Slip past him and clasp my mother's knees

Nausicaa tells Odysseus to go past the king and appeal to the queen, **Arete**, first – because in this court it's the queen's goodwill that decides whether a guest gets help.

LINE 289

Hear me, Atrytone Greek prayers usually name the god by one of their titles, then ask for something specific. **Atrytone** ('the Unwearied One') is a title of **Athene**.

LINE 295

out of deference to her Father's brother Poseidon This is why Athene has only helped from a distance, in disguise: she's avoiding an open clash with **Poseidon**, who is her uncle. Poseidon is Odysseus' great enemy among the gods – Odysseus blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus (Book 9) – and his grudge is what keeps Odysseus from home.

